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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000883

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS; OES/ENV  
COMMERCE FOR ITA:ABENAISSA  
KATHMANDU FOR EST HUB

E.O 12958:N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVES AIR QUALITY

1. Summary: Preliminary studies show a significant reduction in Colombo's ambient air lead levels after phasing out leaded gasoline in June, 2002. The Government will further improve urban air quality by introducing new vehicle emission and fuel quality standards. End Summary.

NO MORE LEADED FUEL  
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2. Leaded gasoline had been a growing source of ambient air pollution in Sri Lanka's urban areas. By 2001, Sri Lanka was burning 244,000 metric tons of leaded gasoline. According to estimates, 50% of the gasoline in Sri Lanka was consumed in Colombo, releasing approximately 25 tons of lead into the atmosphere annually. As a result, lead pollution was a major health concern, with studies indicating high blood lead levels in Colombo residents compared to those in rural areas.

3. Implementation of existing air quality management laws and regulations was very slow, until recently. Lead-free gasoline was introduced in 1997 with a planned total phase-out by 2005. Under the current government, the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) accelerated the plan by discontinuing the production and sale of leaded gasoline in mid-2002. Although no detailed statistical analyses are available, a study sponsored by the USAID/US-Asia Environmental Partnership Program (US-AEP) showed ambient lead levels have dropped 80% six months after phasing out lead in gasoline.

4. Measures of particulate lead, from vehicle emissions and roads, burning of garbage, industrial emissions and soil, also show a declining trend when compared with historical data. More importantly, according to preliminary studies, introduction of unleaded gasoline has contributed to a marked (86%) reduction in blood lead levels in traffic policemen. This indicates the magnitude of the health impact and the benefits of the lead reduction program.

OTHER INITIATIVES  
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5. In order to facilitate the air quality management programs, an Air Quality Management Center (AirMac) was formed in November 2001 under the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources. Since then AirMac has been instrumental in improving stakeholder participation. The present focus of the AirMac is on an accelerated program to implement emission standards in January 2004 and developing a Clean Air 2005 action plan. World Bank and USAID/US-AEP are the two major donors helping Sri Lanka air quality improvement programs.

6. A recent World Bank sponsored study co-ordinated by the AirMac found fine particulate matter as the air pollutant of greatest concern in urban areas. The high sulfur dioxide content, found mainly in diesel fuel is directly related to particulate matter level. Poor vehicle maintenance practices, lack of vehicle testing programs, and the import of diesel vehicles (due to a petroleum pricing policy favoring diesel) have contributed to increased air pollution. Emissions of smoke and soot from diesel vehicles, and from petrol vehicles equipped with two stroke engines (the ubiquitous trishaws), are believed to be among the main sources of particulate matter emissions in urban areas.

7. The GSL hopes to reduce these pollutants through the new Clean Air 2005 action plan, which aims to reduce vehicle emissions and improve fuel quality. New emission standards will apply for all vehicles from July 1, 2003. Euro II equivalent standards will apply for imports. Less stringent emission standards will apply for in use vehicles from July 1, 2003 with the intention of moving towards Euro II and Euro III

standards by 2007 and 2010, respectively. Arrangements to establish 200 vehicle-testing centers throughout the country are underway. According to Transport Ministry sources, annual mobile emission certificates will be mandatory for all motor vehicles beginning in January 2004. In addition, Sri Lanka is considering banning the importation of two stroke trishaws.

18. Also, new (Euro II equivalent) fuel quality standards will apply from July 1, 2003 for gasoline. Euro III standards will apply for gasoline in 2007. Diesel standards (now at Euro I) will also be improved gradually to Euro II and Euro III levels between 2004 and 2007, allowing adequate time for the CPC to launch fuel reformulation programs in its refinery. The AirMac will launch an independent auditing mechanism to monitor standards of fuel available in the market. In addition, the GSL is planning to launch a power plant emission-monitoring program and to carry out health impact assessments relating to air pollution.

19. US-AEP recently sponsored a fleet characterization study to measure emissions. A remote sensing measurement technology developed by Environmental Systems Products, Tucson, AZ is being used for this study. Results of this study will help in deciding priority vehicle types, makes and years of manufacture to phase in the emission standards in January 2004. Understanding fleet characteristics is necessary to implement vehicle testing with minimum social and economic impediments for vehicle owners, and to avoid a potential political backlash on the air quality program.

110. Comment: This is a field in which the combination of US and multilateral assistance with US technology has generated measurable improvements in the economy of Sri Lanka and the health of its citizens. End Comment.

Wills